**Visionaries of the Century: Karl Marx (1818-1883)**

*Karl Marx was a visionary who strived to increase the power of the working class as well as increase the supporters of the new philosophies of socialism and communism, overthrowing capitalism.*

Dec 18th 1900- The year is coming to an end, yet have we had time to reflect on the changes in our society? Most of us call to mind the people who have recently changed our lives, recollecting on the changes people have made and the impact they’ve had on society throughout the year. What we disregard though are the people who have had unnoticed yet endless ideas and actions, both influential and detrimental effects that have helped shape our world to be what it is today. One individual whose works and ideas unnoticeably changed and are still changing society is Karl Marx, a revolutionary, social scientist and historian of the 19th century.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was born in Germany, into a middle-class family. Though his father wanted him to study law, Marx was always more fascinated in philosophy and literature. Throughout his childhood, Marx father emphasized the teachings of Voltaire, and finally Marx became a journalist. This plays a vital role in the belief system and characteristics of Karl Marx, portraying his combination of German insight with French philosophy. His theory of **Marxism** is one which has influence the thinking of people and rulers around the world, yet the path towards the formulation of his ideas gives us a better idea of his true intentions.

During the 1840s, Marx became a member of the Young Hegelians movement, a group of individuals who opposed their teacher, and potentially the government. When Marx moved to Paris, he met his soon-to-be partner, and new friend Frederich Engels (1820-1895). He was influenced by their writings and ideas and was impressed by the new concept of **“historical materialism”**.



In 1844, Marx and Engels moved from Paris to Brussels, where Karl Marx dedicated his time to studying history and collaborated his ideas with Engels of what he called “the materialist conception of history”. This ideology looks for the causes of developments and changes in human society. During this time, Marx then wrote “The Poverty of Philosophy”, which opposed the idealistic socialism of P.J Proudhon. This writing set the basis for Marx and Engels ideas and their influences on people to come. While Brussels, in Marx and Engels also observed the conditions of the factories and their workers and noticed the mistreatment of the working people, and the differences in classes between the people who ran the factories, and those working there.

Marx believed that industrial capitalism, the then present and still present form of economy, would be overruled by “**communism”**. After experience with politics, and seeing how capitalism works as well as and studying history with Engels, Marx formulated that What Marx and Engels believed mattered were the production of goods and the ways in which society was organized into classes if producers and exploiters. When studying history and more importantly, **historical materialism**, they saw that it consisted of successive forms of exploitative production and workers rebelling against them. Marx and Engels believed that **capitalist exploitation** was only the most recent form of exploiting workers.

Marx and Engels identified **“the working class”** as the class being exploited. They believed that a majority of the population of the world fell into this category, yet the rich businessmen were ruling over them. Marx and Engels believed that as industrialization continued, more and more people would fall into the category of the working class. This in turn would lead to the capitalists monopolizing the economy, which would eventually lead to the Proletarians taking a stand. This led to Marx most famous proposal, that the working class, also known as the **Proletarians**, must start a rebellion against **Bourgeoisie**, or the capitalists. He believed that the revolution would end in a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and private property. With the demolition of capitalism, the exploitation would not exist anymore and the current state would be beneficial to everyone.

In 1848, uprisings began to occur across Europe, in France, Austria, Russia, Italy, Hungary and the German states. Seeing as though the “rebellions” had started, Marx and Engels published their most influential work to date, The Communist Manifesto. This work was telling the workers of all nations to come together in overthrowing capitalism. As Marx said in “The Communist Manifesto, “story of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes”.

Marx read Fourier as well, and when examining Marx works we see parts of the ideals of **Utopian society.** In Marx’s mind, a Utopian society would be where the Proletariat triumphed over the Bourgeoisie. Though this did not happen in his lifetime, we can already see the impact he could have made on modern rulers and rulers to come.

In 1867, Marx produced another one of his most famous works, coined “Capital”. Here he lays out his elaborate theory of labor value and his ideas on why capitalism will in fact collapse. “Capital” claims that the value of a commodity can be objectively measured by the average number of labor hours required to produce that commodity and that in a capitalist society goods and services tend to be sold at prices that do not reflect their true value.

Marx envisioned a utopian society of equality and freedom, yet without a set blueprint on how this should be carried out, people are free to read between the lines and infer whatever they like about his ideas. Karl Marx was the most important visionary of the 19th century, not because of one specific idea he had, but more because he made the effort to change society into a more equally based environment, and his efforts as well as ideas were everlasting. We don’t know what the future holds, but surely what we witnessed with the life of Karl Marx will have a greater influence that we can even imagine. As Marx said, “A specter is haunting Europe, a beneficial specter – the specter of communism.\*

-Saniya Jaffer

